

Tape #58

Interview with Stuart Hedley

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Interview by Chuck Dunkerly

Transcribed and logged by Gray Clevenger

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00:47

CD: So Stu, when you went back aboard the West Virginia to fight the fires could you describe the state of the ship?

SH: Uh, when I went aboard the ship was on the bottom, it was righted and was already settling on the bottom. Uh, the fires had more or less, been put out but the intense heat was still there, like when we went into the 3rd Division compartment the heat was unbearable and yet the hose, which was sprayed all over the compartment, it took about 40 to 45 minutes to cool that place down. And uh, the bomb that hit the turret, we saw, then saw the catapult all torn up and everything and the left gun was demolished, no longer any good and uh **(02:00)**. The fact that, the one thing that I realized when we went back aboard our flag was flying on the stern of the ship and it was flying in the breeze at that time 'cause it was about 2:30 in the afternoon I guess. But uh, I did not know that Captain Benyen had died on the bridge until afterward we learned that and we also learned that Dory Miller who stood about six foot, four I guess, six foot three, weighed about 298 pounds grabbed a machine gun and started firing at planes as they were going by, and there's a man that uh, I'm almost ashamed to say this but at this particular time **(03:00)** blacks, Filipinos, Hispanics weren't allowed to serve as boats and mates and machinist, mates and such, they could be mess attendants and orderlies and such and he was the captain's orderly. And uh, his claim to fame was he was a fleet heavy weight boxer, boxing champion. And later we learned that he had never fired a gun in his life until he fired that machine gun that morning. Whether he hit anything or not we don't know, that's immaterial, just the bravery that he had to do what he did, I rightfully believe that he deserved the Medal of Honor. And I've been fighting for that for years. I was interviewed by Tom Brokof for National **(04:00)** Geographic and I stated the very same thing to him about 3 times. And uh, uh I've written letters and nothings been done about it. Well, Dory was killed two years later on a destroyer and that's probably why they've never taken any action on it, but still in all, his parents still rightfully deserve that today. If they're still alive, I don't even know if they're alive yet or not. But, uh, the ship was, ah, pretty badly damaged, however, when your sitting

on the bottom you don't know the damage that was on that port side. Until March of 1942, when they raised it up, then they realized we got hit with nine torpedoes **(5:00)** on the port side. And when they raised the Oklahoma, they found out she had been hit by nine torpedoes. Now the thing that many people don't know is the Maryland was the sister ship to the West Virginia. Admiral Pie was onboard the West Virginia, and he - in January - ordered the Maryland back to the states for a blister, an outer hull. Well, in putting the outer hull on her, they didn't put the builds keel because it widened the ship, made it more like a, a bathtub, and... Whereas the Tennessee and the West Virginia did have the builds keels. And the builds keels go out from the, the curvature **(6:00)** of the bottom. And that's so when you're in heavy seas, it dampens the ship. Well, we were fortunate because when we started to tip over, we were bellow the Tennessee. So when we started to roll over our builds keel caught under the builds keel of the Tennessee. That's what held us from rolling over like the Ari...uh, Oklahoma did. And, where the Oklahoma, when she started to roll over, there was nothing for her but to scrape the side of the Maryland, and so she went on over. But during that period that we were locked under the Tennessee, the first Lieutenant had time to open up all the sea valves on the starboard side to counter-act the flooding, to level us up so we went straight down.

6:55

CD: Now Stu, when you saw the flag flying on the stern of the...

SH: Me?

CD: Yeah.

SH: I did.

CD: When you saw that...

SH: When we came, I, I was proud. I was proud to see that. Now that's another thing too. If you recall, on Sunday night Walter Winchell came on the radio and announced that the West Virginia was sunk, the Arizona was sunk, the Utah was sunk, the California was sunk, the Oklahoma was sunk, and the secretary of Navy Knox met with Walter Winchell and told him he would have to retract his statements. Why? Because according to BuShip's manual a vessel is not sunk as long as it can fly the Ensign. Arizona was split in half, but the Ensign was flying from her foremast. **(8:00)** The West Virginia was sitting on the bottom, but our flag was flying from the stern. The Utah was capsized, but they could've flown the flag from her hull. They could've flown the flag from the hull of the Oklahoma. And

therefore sunk means that that ship is completely underwater. So, Walter Winchell came back the following Sunday and announced that the West Virginia, the Arizona, the California, and Utah were heavily damaged. And that was the terminology which would explain it. But, uh, there's so many variables that were, uh, present at that time.

(9:00) For example, like over Connioy air station, uh, we just celebrated the ninety-ninth birthday of John Finn. Who is the sole survivor alive today with the Medal of Honor from Pearl Harbor. And an amazing thing- that man was hit nine times and wouldn't give up. And that's why he got the Medal of Honor, though. And, uh, he's got more guts than I've got even to this day. And, uh, uhhh, the fact that all the airplanes were lined up wingtip to wingtip at Pickem Field, and Wheeler Field, and Fort Island, Connioy Air Station and such. **(10:00)** So in my, now this is my estimation, not anything official. But, my estimation: we were sitting ducks for that attack.

10:27

<<Interruption>>

CD: So Stu, you've been back to the Memorial?

SH: Oh yes.

CD: When you stand on that structure over that battleship at rest. What goes through your mind?

10:43

SH: All the men that are entombed in that ship. Eleven hundred and seventy-seven men, in less than a flash of a second. And it wasn't too long ago that I spoke right over in Balboa Park against the anti-war group. They were complaining because we lost something like around three thousand men in three to four years. I said we lost two thousand four-hundred and some-odd men in less than forty-five minutes in Pearl Harbor. They didn't even know that. It's uh, it's a strange thing but when we went out there in 1974- that was my first time aboard the memorial- the greatest number of people on that memorial were Japanese. And there was one woman, she was crying, **(12:00)** and my ar... my wife went over and put her arm around her and she asked her, "What are you crying about?" She said, "I am so ashamed of my people for what they did here." And Wanda told her, "My husband was here on that day. And he did exactly what he was told as the Japanese were told exactly what they were to do." So she told her, she says, "You have nothing to be ashamed of." And she looked at my wife and she could not believe that an American was telling her that. She thought in her mind, and she told Wanda, she says, "You know, I thought you people hated us." I never hated the Japanese all during

World War II. **(13:00)** Some of my best friends were Japanese before the attack ever took place. I'll show you some pictures of them after. Darling people, and the people that I lived with had been missionaries to Japan. And they explained to me that as we went across the Pacific and the Japanese surrendered, we would find that they are a very gracious people. Now some of the warlords and some of the warriors are just as vigilant as our Marines were. Some of them just as deadly as our Marines were too. But, uh, true: when we arrived in Japan in 1945 and I was on occupational forces I found exactly what Mrs. Corey told me to be true. They were very gracious, humble people. **(14:02)** They were forced into the war just like we were. But, uh, I thought back when I was aboard there. Eisenhower, it was during his administration that that memorial was built. And the officer that was telling us about it explained to us two things: that memorial does not touch the Arizona. It's built across it. However, the flagpole that you think is attached to the memorial is attached to the Arizona. And...is Dan still there?

Dan: Yeah.

SH: You remember taking me out there and raising the flag for me?

15:00

Dan: I do.

SH: He raised the flag, brought it back down, I still have that flag to this day at home. And I also have a flag that flew over the air station in Afghanistan on July 4th, 2004. And, uh, those are memorabilia that mean a lot to me.

15:30

CD: Stu?

SH: Yes.

CD: What is the lesson of Pearl Harbor to us today?

SH: Well, when I go out to the schools, the question I'm asked is, "Mr. Hedley, what's the difference between 9/11 and December 7, 1941." And I tell them, "One thing. Within instantly we knew who the enemy was we were going to fight on December the 7th." **(16:00)** When those planes come over they had the symbol of Japan. We knew that Japan was our enemy. 9/11 we're struck on our own homeland, and we to this day don't know who they are. We call them terrorists, and they're over there in Afghanistan and Iraq, and we still don't know who they are. Because it could be anybody you're working alongside of. But in World War II, in Pearl Harbor we knew who we

were going to be fighting to the end with. And strange as it may seem, uh, all of our practicing, and battle maneuvers, and everything from January 1941 right up till December **(17:00)** was we're going to fight the Japanese at sea. We knew that Japan was the enemy that we were going to have to fight. And so that's what we were practicing for. But we didn't anticipate them coming in with a sneak attack on an early Sunday morning. But it was quite an experience for a youngster. All of us...because, most of us were anywhere from seventeen years old to twenty-one. Tell you a strange story, didn't find it out until March of forty-two. We had three young men: seventeen, eighteen, and twenty. That were trapped inside of compartment A1-11 on board the San Francisco, I mean West Virginia...

<<Interruption>>

18:13

CD: Um, so Stu there, there are a lot of people every year who go out to that memorial on the Arizona to learn something, kind of glean something out of that, that day. For someone who was there and lived through it, felt it, smelt it, what would you say to those people.

SH: Well I've been out there with quite a few of them. Ah, I was out there for Tiger Cruise in 19... or 2001. 2002 rather, and uh, there were eight men in our group that had been aboard the Arizona, **(19:00)** and they survived it. And I saw them when they were looking at the names in marble up there. Tears just streaming down their cheeks because those were shipmates that they were closely related with that were still entombed in the ship. It's a nostalgic feeling that we all have when we go out to the museum...or the memorial. But I think, from the past, one of the highlights has been to visit the museum first and go through the theatre. Now they have one of the finest documentaries that I've ever seen **(20:00)** prior to getting aboard the boat and going out to the memorial. So, after watching the film and then getting on the boat you're already thinking in terms of what you saw, of the aftermath when you go out to the, uh, memorial itself. To have it explained to you, the construction of it, uh, is a history lesson. That's one of the things that I am very grateful for, that many high school kids go out there. There's nothing in their history books about it, but boy when they go through that, they never forget it. And I for one **(21:00)** *(laughs)* when I went out there the first time the Missouri wasn't there. And, um, they were talking about bringing the Missouri and I thought to myself, "They should leave the Missouri back in Long Beach because it's going to detract from the Arizona, the Oklahoma, Maryland, and those. However, I was proved wrong because it enhanced the people that came out there to realize that what they're on is a battleship which is what the Arizona was

that's underwater, that they can't walk around the deck on. But on the Missouri, why they can get the feeling of what it was like for us young men **(22:01)** when we lived aboard those ships. So, it was a good move. Uh, I started to tell you about that compartment A1-11. There were three men trapped inside that compartment, and it's hard to believe they lived from December the 7th till December the 23rd. No food, now they did have some water...how they did it, nobody knows. However, Bob Kronumberg had the, uh, calendar that they had put up and put a red mark for each day. Now the only way that they could have determined that was by their watch for a twenty-four hour period, but they existed and when they brought the ship up **(23:00)** in March that's when they found the three bodies huddled together there in that compartment when they opened it up. And they had a piece of paper up and they had marked it. Bob Kronumberg took that to Washington D.C., turned it over to the Navy department and they lost it. He was furious we he heard that. But, uh, the Oklahoma was upside down. There's a buddy of mine that you're going to be interviewing I understand, Jim Bounds. Thirty-six hours inside that ship upside down and he survived with a lot about, I think there was twenty-seven of them that they brought out fro the bottom of the ship. And, um, Jim is a character. **(24:00)** You call him Wyatt Earp *(laughs)*. But, uh, when I joined the Pearl Harbor Association back in 1984, the man that introduced me to it was one of my shipmates Rex Kelly. He was then the president of the chapter, and I knew nothing about this organization. And, uh, so he knew that I was on the San Francisco with him and so he asks me, he says uh, "How 'bout joining up and this Pearl Harbor chapter 3." I said, "What'll I have to do?" He says, "Fill out this application." So I did. We were meeting at the air station, uh, Miramar air station at the time in the Chief's quarters. And I started to meet some of the fellas, and uh, **(25:00)** pretty soon I ran into a guy by the name of Harry Hall, and uh, he says "Stu, how 'bout helping me out with the parades?" I said, "Okay." Pretty soon he handed me the whole parade chairman, and, uh, I was working for the *Lomisa* Spring Valley School District, and Robby and I were talking about Pearl Harbor and one of the teachers overheard me. And he came over and he said, "Stu" he said, "if I get permission to have you speak to my class would you do so?" I said, "I'll be happy to." Well I didn't have all the paraphernalia I got today. I got models of the West Virginia, or uh, Arizona, and Missouri which I display and use. And, uh, I have several different publications, **(26:00)** I have a copy of the surrender with McArthur's signature and all of that on it. And, uh, so he went to the superintendent, and the superintendent calls me in and he says, "If you're going to speak what do you have to show the kids?" I said, "Well, I got a few little artifacts, books and stuff, the story of the West Virginia." He says, "Got any slides?" I said, "Yeah I got slides." But I said, "I really don't have a good

projector.” He says, “You go over to the shop and you pick out whatever projector you want, and that’s yours as long as you talk about Pearl Harbor.” Well I’m still talking about Pearl Harbor and I still got that projector, and I’ve long been retired from that school district, and he has gone on to be with the Lord.

27:00

CD: Stu, I got a couple of follow up questions for you.

SH: Sure.

CD: Did you loose any buddies and friends that day?

SH: Many. Many friends. Uh, like I say, I didn’t realize it at the time, but all my shipmates from Division 3 that were in the turret on the left gun were wiped out and, uh, uh, like I say Crosan and I were the only two in turret 3, or, uh, the right gun. And this is another amazing story. Johnny Anderson, who was also in the third division with me, uh, he was supposed to be in the gun chamber of turret 3 on the right side, but he was operating a motor launch that morning. And, when he saw the torpedo wake, he brought the boat along side the armor belt, jumped up on the armor belt, stuck his head and shoulders through the port hole, **(28:00)** which went into the ward room. When that explosion took place, the water forced him right on through. He never got to his battle station, but had he, he would have been in the left gun and he would have been killed. And, on December the 9th we were given a postcard to send to our families, telling them we are well, signed our name, and that was all. And Johnny had sent one of those letters home to Kansas City where he lived. But the Navy department had already notified them, that their son had been killed in action. So they were having a memorial service for him in church when the postman who got the card ran all the way down to the church handed it to his mother, his mother read that card, had a heart attack and died right there. **(29:00)** And he wasn’t in the memorial because he was still alive. That was an odd story. And Johnny Anderson was aboard the San Francisco with me, and when we got shot up down in Guadalcanal Dr. Momonus asked me to help identify bodies the next morning. And one of the bodies I had to help identify was my buddy Johnny Anderson. A fourteen inch shell blast came right through the blast shield of the five inch that he was on, split him right in half, his head and shoulders were over underneath the vent. I started laughing and Dr. Momonus hauled off and hit me just as hard as he could swing his fist. And he told me, he says, “Hedley, you have every right to put me on report because an officer has no authority whatsoever to hit a **(30:00)** enlisted man, but if” he says, “I hadn’t of done that, you would have gone stark raving mad.” And, I had a sore

jaw for about three days, but he snapped me out of it and I was able to help identify bodies up on the gun deck, because every five-inch gun we had was destroyed, except gun six. That's the gun Eddy Hueber and I were on.

END OF TAPE